differences

TERESA DE LAURETIS

Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities
An Introduction

The essays that comprise this issue were generated in the context of a working conference on theorizing lesbian and gay sexualities that was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz in February 1990.[1] The project of the conference was based on the speculative premise that homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or by homology. In other words, it is no longer to be seen either as merely transgressive or deviant vis-à-vis a proper, natural sexuality (i.e., institutionalized reproductive sexuality), according to the older, pathological model, or as just another, optional "life-style," according to the model of contemporary North American pluralism. Instead, male and female homosexualities – in their current sexual-political articulations of gay and lesbian sexualities, in North America – may be reconceptualized as social and cultural forms in their own right, albeit emergent ones and thus still fuzzily defined, undercoded, or discursively dependent on more established forms. Thus, rather than marking the limits of the social space by designating a place at the edge of culture, gay sexuality in its specific female and male cultural (or subcultural) forms acts as an agency of social process whose mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity.

In this perspective, the work of the conference was intended to articulate the terms in which lesbian and gay sexualities may be understood and imaged as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization, counteracting dominant discourses with other constructions of the subject in culture. It was my hope that the conference would also problematize some of the discursive constructions and constructed silences in the emergent field of "gay and lesbian studies," and would further explore questions that have as yet been barely broached, such as the respective and/or common grounding of current discourses and practices of homo-sexualities in relation to gender and to

race, with their attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location. We would, I hoped, be willing to examine, make explicit, compare, or confront the respective histories, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks that have characterized the self-representations of North American lesbians and gay men, of color and white, up to now; from there, we could then go on to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual. As I will suggest, that is what the essays do, each in its own way. And hence the title of the conference and of this issue of *differences*: "Queer Theory" conveys a double emphasis – on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences.

The Gay/Lesbian Bar: A Theoretical Joint?

The term "queer," juxtaposed to the "lesbian and gay" of the subtitle, is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter, by now established and often convenient, formula.[2] For the phrase "lesbian and gay" or "gay and lesbian" has become the standard way of referring to what only a few years ago used to be simply "gay" (e.g., the gay community, the gay liberation movement) or, just a few years earlier still, "homosexual." For example, a hasty survey of some titles of classic works of gay history and sociology in the past twenty years lists Jeffrey Weeks's *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (1977), John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (1983), Kenneth Plummer, ed., *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (1981), Dennis Altman's *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1971) and *The Homosexualization of America* (1982), and Stephen Murray's *Social Theory, Homosexual Realities* (1984). In contrast, the 1987 article by Steven Epstein's in *Socialist Review*, where all these books are discussed, is titled "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity" and the 1989 anthology edited by Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past.*

The discourse of white gay historiography and sociology, which added on women as an afterthought, with little or no understanding of female socio-sexual specificity, developed separately from the printed discourse on white lesbianism that started with Jeannette Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956) and continued with, among others, Sydney Abbott and Barbara Love's *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman* (1972), Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's *Lesbian/Woman* (1972), Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist*

Solution (1973), Ti-Grace Atkinson's *Amazon Odyssey* (1974), Dolores Klaich's *Woman Plus Woman* (1974), Barbara Ponse's *Identities in the Lesbian World: The Social Construction of Self* (1978), to Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," first published in *Signs* in 1980. Those early titles remark an emphasis on gender and socio-cultural specificity – woman, lesbian, feminist, amazon – that is absent from the previous set, but has characterized lesbian thought and self-representation from early on. Apparently, lesbian sexuality does not easily relinquish its imaginary and symbolic ties to gender, however much trouble the latter may cause. There are, of course, some works by lesbians that deal with homosexuality, notably Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role" (1986), but much more frequently North American lesbians have rejected that term for themselves precisely because of its close association with male homosexuality and its elision of both sexual specificity and relevant questions of gender, as well as the stigma still carried by the word homosexual, which many identify as a "medical" term. In Europe and Latin America, the use of the term homosexual (inflected in the feminine) instead of lesbian has other histories and other problems.

Today we have, on the one hand, the terms "lesbian" and "gay" to designate distinct kinds of life-styles, sexualities, sexual practices, communities, issues, publications, and discourses; on the other hand, the phrase "gay and lesbian" or, more and more frequently, "lesbian and gay" (ladies first), has become standard currency: *Coming Up* was called the *Gay/Lesbian Newspaper and Calendar of Events of the Bay Area*, while the more recent *Out/Look* defines itself as a *National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly Magazine.* Similarly, *Black/Out* is the magazine of the National Coalition for Black Lesbians and Gays, *Epicene* is subtitled *Canada's Lesbian and Gay News Magazine*, and so forth. In a sense, the term "Queer Theory" was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them – or at the very least problematize them.

A common front or political alliance of gay men and lesbians (I am speaking generally, of course, not of personal friendships) is made possible, and indeed necessary, in the United States today by the AIDS national emergency and the pervasive institutional backlash against queers of all sexes. I think the alliance itself is a very good thing, though I wish it had happened under less devastating circumstances. But my point is another: that our "differences," such as they may be, are less represented by the discursive coupling of those two terms in the politically correct phrase "lesbian and gay," than they are elided by most of the contexts in which the phrase is used; that

is to say, differences are implied in it but then simply taken for granted or even covered over by the word "and."

An illustration of the double valence of this discursive turn is offered by the recently published *Uranian Worlds*, an annotated bibliography on "alternative sexuality" in science fiction and fantasy, co-authored by Eric Garber and Lyn Paleo, and featuring a double introduction by Samuel Delany and Joanna Russ. Each entry is marked with one or more letters of a six-character code: F [or f] when "lesbian or female bisexuality is a major [or minor] component within a work"; M [or m] for male homosexuality or bisexuality; X for transsexuality, three-sexed aliens, vampirism, etc.; and ? when sexuality in the work is "open to interpretation" (xiv-xv). While the code replicates the current trend (at least on my campus) toward "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning" solidarity, it also includes more literally queer sexualities in the category X; nevertheless, the majority of entries are coded M [m] and/or F [f]. As the authors state in their preface, however, their title

> . . . *is derived from the nineteenth-century word for homosexual,* Uranian. *The term was coined by the early German homosexual emancipationist Karl Ulrichs and was popularly used through the First World War. It refers to Aphrodite Urania, whom Plato had identified as the patron goddess of homosexuality in his* Symposium. *A slight variation,* Uraniad, *was used to describe lesbians. (vii-viii)*

Although coming from a female goddess, the term *Uranian* refers to male homosexuals (obviously the only kind of homosexuality of interest to Plato), and it does so not only in Ulrichs's time but, I suggest, today as well: if the book is not titled "Uranian and Uraniad Worlds," it is probably because the latter term has never gained any currency, and thus the male form serves to designate the entire category of homosexuals, just as the term *man* did the category human before the 1960s wave of feminism. It is not difficult to see, by analogy, how the masculine term *Uranian*, by extending the male form of homosexuality to females, subsumes the latter under the former as "a slight variation," a variation too slight for consideration, such as what linguistics calls an allophone. Why has a specific term for female homosexuality not been developed – why did *Uraniad*, for example, become a discursive casualty of the period through the First World War – is certainly not a question Garber and Paleo could have addressed in their important and very useful book. But it is a question for queer theory to address as the sign of a continuing

failure of representation, an enduring silence on the specificity of lesbianism in the contemporary "gay and lesbian" discourse.

Remarking on this very point, Delany opens his introduction with the words: "The situation of the lesbian in America is vastly different from the situation of the gay male. A clear acknowledgment of this fact, especially by male homosexuals, is almost the first requirement for any sophisticated discussion of homosexual politics in this country" (xix). And, as if he were reading my mind or telepathically sharing the thoughts I put into words in this introduction, he adds:

> *Gay men and gay women may well express solidarity with each other. But in the day to day working out of the reality of liberation, the biggest help we can give each other is a clear and active recognition of the extent and nature of the different contexts and a rich and working sympathy for the different priorities these contexts (for want of a better term) engender. (xix)*

On her part, in her introduction, Russ remembers growing up with a bibliography of literally three titles on the subject of lesbianism, whereas (she notes, with her inimitably sharp wit)

> *Samuel Delany – it wasn't his fault; he was eleven at the time and writing his first novel, but otherwise blameless – would have had a much better time of it, literarily speaking, since Wilde, Gide, and Verlaine were right there on the open library shelves, not to mention Truman Capote's* Other Voices, Other Rooms, *and works by Christopher Isherwood, and Hart Crane was actually known to have been – well, you know. (xxiii)*

Even in science fiction, the most "passionately speculative, daringly original" of genres, she continues, "|s|exuality – including homosexuality – was a male prerogative. We got to wear the chromium bathing suits and be rescued"; so that, now, a book "tracing the sudden visibility of lesbian and gay male characters in sf is a historical detective story" (xxv). However, she also points out, white women writers and all writers of color are still underrepresented in these "Uranian" worlds. In short, even the best intentions cannot undo the differences "engendered" by history and "suddenly visible" in our contemporary "lesbian and gay" discourse.

Since the late 60s, practically since Stonewall, North American lesbians have been more or less painfully divided between an allegiance to the women's movement, with its more or less overt homophobia (Bearchell, Clark) and its appropriation of lesbianism (Case), and an allegiance to the

gay liberation movement, with its more or less overt sexism (Frye). Of late, this division has been recast as an embattled, starkly polarized opposition between sex-radical or s/m lesbians and mainstream or cultural-feminist lesbians; an opposition whereby gay men are, on this side, subsumed under the undifferentiated category "men" and/or not considered pertinent to lesbian life and thought, whereas, on the other side, they would represent the cultural model and the very possibility of lesbian radical sex, as Julia Creet's essay in this issue suggests apropos of Pat Califia's fiction.[3] And again, the mechanical, toggle-switch binarism of this polarization is popularized in two magazine titles, *Off Our Backs* and *On Our Backs*. On their part, gay men seem to be divided in their self-definition and self-representation between "essentialism" and "constructionism," a debate that has been going on parallel to, but ostensibly unaware of, the "essentialism" vs. "anti-essentialism" debate in feminist theory, in which many lesbians have been actively involved. Seldom do gay critics make more than a perfunctory gesture in the direction of lesbian or feminist studies (the essays by Tomás Almaguer and Earl Jackson, Jr. in this issue stand out as nearly exceptional in this regard), while even those lesbian critics who do make reference to gay studies do not usually integrate the latter's insights into a common theoretical frame or shared discourse. A promising move in this direction is the work of "the new archivist of deviance" theorized and enacted in Jennifer Terry's essay in this issue.

The fact of the matter is, most of us, lesbians and gay men, do not know much about one another's sexual history, experience, fantasies, desire, or modes of theorizing. And we do not know enough about ourselves, as well, when it comes to differences between and within lesbians, and between and within gay men, in relation to race and its attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location. We do not know enough to theorize those differences. Thus an equally troubling question in the burgeoning field of "gay and lesbian studies" concerns the discursive constructions and constructed silences around the relations of race to identity and subjectivity in the practices of homosexualities and the representations of same-sex desire.

Surveying the writings of lesbians and gay men of color, one does not find a comparable amount of titles or authors. In part this is due to their restricted institutional access to publishing and higher education, which has only slightly improved in recent years with small presses and great effort. If Russ, growing up in the 50s, knew of only three works of fiction about lesbians, in 1977 there was not even "one book based in Black feminist and Black lesbian experience, fiction or nonfiction," wrote Barbara Smith: "I want

most of all for Black women and Black lesbians somehow not to be alone. . . . Just one work to reflect the reality that I and the Black women whom I love are trying to create. When such a book exists, then each of us will not only know better how to live, but how to dream" (173).[4] Since then, several books of lesbian fiction have been published by black writers, first and foremost Audre Lorde's "biomythography," *Zami* (1982), as well as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Ann Allen Schockley's *Say Jesus and Come to Me* (1982); and just as this issue goes to press, the long awaited collection of Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) finally sees the eerie light of print. Moreover, an excerpt in Carla Trujillo's *Chicana Lesbians* (1991) promises the advent of the first Chicana lesbian novel, Emma Pérez's "Gulf Dreams." As for black gay fiction, the particular mix of science fiction with theory and autobiographical cultural criticism which characterizes Samuel Delany's *Nevèrÿon* tetralogy may be glimpsed in his essay in this issue.

A few more books of nonfiction by lesbian and gay writers of color, combining essays, speeches, poetry, diary entries, letters, autobiography, etc. – the genre boundaries no longer hold – include Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1983), Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984), Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), and several major anthologies, such as Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983), C. Chung, et al., *Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians* (1987), Juanita Ramos's *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians* (1987), and the late Joseph Beam's *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* (1986).[5]

But, besides the severe problem of institutional access, the relatively greater scarcity of works of theory by lesbians and gay men of color may have been also a matter of different choices, different work priorities, different constituencies and forms of address. Perhaps, to a gay writer and critic of color, defining himself gay is not of the utmost importance; he may have other and more pressing priorities in his work and in his life. Perhaps a gay Chicano writer cannot identify with the white, middle-class gay community of the Castro for several reasons that are both socially and sexually overdetermined, as Tomás Almaguer argues in his paper; and he may be offended by Epstein's notion of an "ethnic identity" of San Francisco gay people, regardless of color, in a society fully permeated by racism. A Chicana lesbian might well choose to make her community with Native American women rather than with lesbians period, which usually means mostly white lesbians; or she might channel her energies into theorizing a continuum of Chicana experience, lesbian or not, as Moraga's *teatro* indicates. The words of Barbara Smith quoted above do juxtapose "Black women and Black

lesbians," "Black feminist and Black lesbian experience," uniting them in a common struggle and a continuity of experience as Black female people. And Ekua Omosupe's essay in this issue speaks from and to that empowering experience.

The differences made by race in self-representation and identity argue for the necessity to examine, question, or contest the usefulness and/or the limitations of current discourses on lesbian and gay sexualities, be those discourses dominant (like psychoanalysis, strategically deployed by Elizabeth Grosz's paper in this issue), or be they separatist, emergent, or oppositional. Those differences urge the reframing of the questions of queer theory from different perspectives, histories, experiences, and in different terms. For instance, Sue-Ellen Case's essay in this issue traces the association of heterosexuality with the natural, the healthy, the living and life-giving, and its consequent linking of homosexuality with the unnatural, the sick, the dead and deadly, in a discursive chain which, from Golden Age Spanish drama to the modern scientistic discourse of pure blood and Hitler's death camps, up to the postmodern dominant discourse on AIDS, binds the sexual with the racial in Western cultures, opposing the purity of lawful, patriarchally-gendered sexuality – and its blood right to money – to the contaminated, impure blood of homosexuals, Jews, and Moors. Throughout the centuries, she argues, queers have resisted these proscriptions with various counterdiscourses ranging from mysticism to reveling in impurity to organized political resistance. But, the queer theorist might ask, could this heritage perhaps overdetermine our own contemporary counterdiscourse, our own queer thinking, unwilling or unwitting heir to those discursive tropes?

One of the constructed silences in the discourse of homosexuality as same-sex desire is around interracial relationships, fraught as they are with erotic, economic, social, and emotional stakes. As Lorde so poignantly writes in *Zami*,

> *Muriel seemed to believe that as lesbians, we were all outsiders and all equal in our outsiderhood. "We're all niggers," she used to say, and I hated to hear her say it. It was wishful thinking based on little fact; the ways in which it was true languished in the shadow of those many ways in which it would* always *be false. (203; emphasis added)*

Does that "*always*" stretch as far ahead in the future as it does in the past? Are queer black women and white women, gay men of color and white, condemned to repeat our respective histories, even as we study, reinterpret, and intervene in them to affect the course of human events? Or can our

queerness act as an agency of social change, and our theory construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the racial and the sexual?

Indeed the ambivalence toward interracial relationships may account for Smith's elision or discounting of Schockley's *Loving Her*, a novel about a black-white lesbian relationship, in which the white character's racist, if benevolent, assumptions are made clear to the reader but not countered or remarked upon by either the black protagonist or the narrator. In the context of black feminist politics and theory, of which Smith was at the time one of the most compelling, and one of the extremely few, courageously lesbian, voices, it is not surprising that her critical advocacy should focus on a lesbian reading of Toni Morrison's bestseller *Sula*, with its haunting portrayal of an intense and life-long, if profoundly ambivalent, friendship between two black women, rather than on the happy-ending lesbian romance of a black woman and her young daughter rescued from an abusive marriage, and a life without social or spiritual rewards, by an upper-class white woman. Exhilarating as the descriptions of their mutual sexual fulfillment had to be to a lesbian reader, black or white, in 1977 – when almost no other such description existed in print – it is not difficult to see why *Loving Her* would hardly "reflect," as Smith wrote, "the reality that I and the Black women whom I love are trying to create" (173).

Yet, for all its unresolvable contradictions, or possibly even because of them, this least represented form of same-sex desire may be potentially productive of new forms of self, community and social relations. It was by living in a black neighborhood, with her Jewish lover, that Minnie Bruce Pratt came to understand her white Christian identity as the most grievous, *structural* constraint on her lesbianism, and that her political analysis was prompted and sustained by a personal, experientially urgent motivation to fight the deep structures of racism in herself and in others; it was the exclusions and self-denial imposed by her white Christian parents' home, and later by her white feminist community, that led to her self-displacement and to the new meaning of community as an anti-racist project in her "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," as theorized by Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty. Finally, it is because sexuality is so inevitably personal, because it so inextricably entwines the self with others, fantasy with representation, the subjective with the social, that racial as well as gender differences are a crucial area of concern for queer theory, and one where critical dialogue alone can provide a better understanding of the specificity and partiality of our respective histories, as well as the stakes of some common struggles.

The Essays

Sue-Ellen Case's "Tracking the Vampire" is the theoretical performance of a queer theory of same-sex desire built on the trope of the vampire, the "queer fanged creature" whose kiss, indeed, makes a woman immortal: it frees her from the mortality of reproductive sexuality and from capture by the imaginary Oedipal mirror, transubstantiating her into a being no longer subject to the hierarchies of gender and race; a being whose queer desire, "challenging the Platonic parameters of Being – the borders of life and death . . . is constituted as a transgression of these boundaries and of the organicism which defines the living as the good." A figure of excess, the trope of "the double she" taunts both the old discourse of biology and its lingering assumptions in feminist theory, shaking the heterosexual foundations of the feminist discourse of woman. "To read that desire as lesbian is not to reinscribe it with dominant, heterosexist categories of gender, for lesbian, in queer theory, is a particular dynamic in the system of representation: the doubled trope of 'she's,' constructed in the dominant discourse as the doubly inferior, the doubly impure. . . ." In tracing a genealogy of the figure through the vampire's apparitions in the mystical imagery of Juan de la Cruz, the poetry of Rimbaud, the theatrical camp of Oscar Wilde, and the choreopoems of Alexis DeVeaux, the essay delineates at once a new discursive space and a performative discourse of queer subjectivity.

In Samuel Delany's theoretical provocation, "Street Talk/Straight Talk" are the twin rhetorical modes of the doubly impure discourse on the sexual body which inflect public information, or rather, disinformation concerning AIDS. His argument rests on a conceit: "Imagine a discourse, flung down on our coordinate system, traversing all four of the rhetorical quadrants outlined above: to one side of it rises the axial of death. Any utterance within that discourse is a continuous and uninflected curve that shoots across a deadly locus; it is stopped by and absorbed by death at that terrifying and totalized point of unity. From there, the curve flows toward the axial of life – but a life that is wholly and ideally secure, rich in pleasure, close to immobile. . . . The discourse approaches that lively, that imaginary axis asymptotically, yearningly, steadily, endlessly. . . ." In a collage of various kinds of utterances inflected by different rhetorics – an undergraduate paper, a newspaper account, a report in a medical journal, his own published fiction and unpublished, personal recollections of sexual encounters, safe-sex demonstrations, etc. – Delany shows how the rhetoric of street talk fashions a discourse of experience, of street wisdom, where all is evidence: the discourse inclines toward life, safety, and pleasure. In the rhetoric of straight

talk, on the other hand, where every figure is manipulated to convey the presumption of knowledge, the discourse inclines toward death, fear, and warnings against sex. But neither knows. Each intersects with the other, in mutual contradiction and misrecognition, and the sum total of these encounters is a discursive disarticulation.

With the question "Lesbian Fetishism?" Elizabeth Grosz aims to stretch the limits of psychoanalytic theory in order to explore the potential usefulness of some of its concepts as strategic tools with which to forge a "lesbian theory." Perversely, she chooses fetishism, which in Freud and Lacan is a uniquely male perversion, and thus not open to women. Yet, in the Lacanian revision, both the hysteric and the narcissistic woman phallicize a part or the whole of their own body, she argues, whereas the woman with a masculinity complex, the masculine lesbian, takes a feminine love object because she loves the phallus in the other woman's body: "the masculine woman takes an external love-object – another woman – and through this love-object is able to function as if she *has*, rather than *is*, the phallus. As with the fetishist, this implies a splitting of the ego." What may be gained by describing this form of female homosexuality as fetishistic is not entirely clear, Grosz concludes, and thus her answer must remain strategic: "Like the fetishist, I want to say both that she is or could be seen in terms of fetishism, and also, at the same time, that she is not." If the choices available to feminist theorists are either to accept psychoanalysis wholesale, or to reject it altogether, or else a little of both, then she prefers the last one, "the fetishist's solution."

In "Theorizing Deviant Historiography," Jennifer Terry proposes a theoretical model for writing the history of homosexuality and a new figure of contemporary historian, "the new archivist of deviance": "I write as an historian of homosexual subjectivity – which is to say, as an historian of our presence under the present circumstances of widespread homophobia. I do not attempt to correct the historical record through locating great homosexuals in the past in order to reconstruct their effaced stories. Instead I look for the conditions which make possible, and those which constrain, the . . . historical emergence of subjects who come to be called lesbians and gay men." The essay elaborates Foucault's notion of effective history as one that does not retrieve the events and actors elided by official history but rather lays bare the processes and operations that produced those elisions, those constructed silences. Drawing on Spivak's deconstructive strategies to unravel the knot of history, narrative, and desire in a major medico-scientific study of "sex variants" (male and female homosexuals) in the 1930s, Terry brings to light the traces of a counterdiscourse that remains excessive to the

dominant historical account and resists its moral and political agenda of normalization. Her analysis of the case histories reveals at once the operations of power within the pathologizing discourse, which produce deviant subject formation, and the interventions in that discourse of the "sex variants" themselves, whose counterdiscourse of deviance produces the concept of deviant subjectivity as "a genealogy of survival."

Why do so few homosexually active Chicanos define themselves as "gay," is the question addressed in Tomás Almaguer's "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior," a sociological essay that draws on recent anthropological research and on the Chicana lesbian theory of Cherríe Moraga. The cultural dissonance that homosexual Chicanos experience in reconciling their primary socialization in family life with the emergence of the modern gay subculture, he argues, derives from their being caught in the crosscurrent of "two distinct sexual systems": "the European-American and Mexican/Latin-American systems have their own unique ensemble of sexual meanings, categories for sexual actors, and scripts that circumscribe sexual behavior. Each system also maps the human body in different ways by placing different values on homosexual erotic zones." In the former system, the structured meaning of homosexuality rests on sexual object choice, i.e., the biological sex of the partner; in the latter, it rests on the sexual aim, i.e., the sexual act performed with the partner and articulated along the active/passive axis. Thus, in the Mexican/Latin-American system, there is no subject position equivalent to the North American "gay man." Excluded from the socio-economically privileged space of the primarily white gay community by "their structural position at the subordinate ends of both the class and racial hierarchies," Chicanos are dependent on ethnicity and especially the family as a primary basis of identity and survival. And hence the relevance of Chicana lesbian writings, which have framed the analysis of socio-sexual identity in relation to the strictly patriarchal values of the Chicano family and the cultural mythology of the Spanish conquest, whose pernicious effects in Mexican history endure in Chicano and Chicana culture.

"Lesbian?" asks somewhat skeptically the poem that opens Ekua Omosupe's essay. For, indeed, she is as much a poet as she is an essayist and, being black, she would not use the word "lesbian" by itself, without the crucial specification of her title, "Black/Lesbian/Bulldagger," which frames the racially unmarked word with signifiers of invisibility and self-hatred, re-marking it as doubly impure. In thus reclaiming that personal-political identity in its female-inflected multiplicity, the poem announces and prefigures the critical project of "distill[ing] theory from the 'texts' of our lives" – a

project that empowers the critical-creative writings of other black lesbians and other lesbians of color. In the text of this subject's life, one *is* born a lesbian but might not (have) become one if the constructed silences of white lesbian discourse, as well as those of a racist and homophobic society, had not been shattered by the work of other black women warriors poets mothers, like Audre Lorde, and by their insistent asking "are you doing yours?" *Sister Outsider*, the title of Lorde's collected essays from which this essay draws its inspiration, "is an apt metaphor for the Black lesbian's position in relation to the white dominant political cultures and to her own Black community as well." Titles, metaphors, images, and words – the stuff of literary representation – are weapons in a war waged with the forces of death, but they can also kill those who wield them, Omosupe warns. "Because we have absorbed the silences of others and made them our own, it is no easy task nor trivial undertaking to move from silence into visibility and voice. It is a challenge that cannot be taken lightly, but must be met with boldness, responsibility, and scrutiny."

"Scandalous Subjects" is a theoretical exploration of gay male narrative as a practice of writing and of reading through which the gay male subject actively "disengages his sexuality from the phallocratic libidinal economy." Earl Jackson's reading of Robert Glück's fiction and critical writings is guided by the feminist strategy of foregrounding one's enunciative position (his "reading as a gay man") in order to discourage the association of masculine authorship with an objective or universal point of view. "The gay male narrator can write from an embodied subject position . . . whose desiring relation to other male bodies does not provide an avenue through which the penis becomes theologized as phallus." Unlike the heterosexual imaginary, where the male body is structured by a rigid antagonism of active and passive roles defined by penetration, and where *jouissance*, ecstasy, and excess threaten the psycho-physical boundaries of the self, the gay male imaginary of the body and subjectivity itself are constituted by "an intersubjective narcissism . . . in which self and other intermesh, and such that the ejaculation 'lost' is 'regained' in the partner." Reframing the Lacanian mirror stage from the perspective of Glück's metanarrative reflections and "scandalous realism," the essay proposes gay sexuality as both a disruptive force and one of communal cohesion and personal identity; the new, post-Stonewall gay narrative, thriving on the social logic of scandal, forges new possibilities of socio-sexual identity and community, and new ways of writing the male body.

The feminist "sex wars" of the 80s, with their stake in pornography as a representation of sexuality that is either oppressive or liberating for

women, are the place and date of birth of Julia Creet's "Daughter of the Movement." Now older and wiser, the essay recasts the question whether lesbian sadomasochism is politically feminist into a personal-theoretical meditation on how feminism works in the scenario of a lesbian s/m fantasy, suggesting that the unrelenting popularity of the debate has much to do with the (re)definition of power within feminism and with the power of feminism itself. Reading Pat Califia's erotic fiction in *Macho Sluts* against the background of the feminist discourse on sexuality and in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory, Creet argues that "feminism has created, *in tension with* the law of the Father, a new set of strictures, which function symbolically although, unlike the law of the Father, they cannot be accurately located in a legal, institutional, or other discursive system." This "law of the Mother," already present in the "maternal feminism" of the past century, lives on in the association of maternity with morality that contemporary feminism prescribes for women. The symbolic figure of the feminist mother, represented in the authority of a reified or abstract "lesbian community," acts as the (internalized) legislator of politically and sexually correct behavior. It is this "symbolic Mother vested in feminism," rather than the law of the Father, that functions as the repressive force in the lesbian s/m fantasy, producing a lesbian erotic identity based on transgression and outlaw status within feminism. Finally, what the lesbian s/m fantasy provides is less a window on perversion than "entry into a social conversation" about feminist values, sexuality and desire, guilt and punishment, violence and self-preservation.

In addressing a wide spectrum of issues from sexual practices, AIDS, and lesbian sadomasochism to the conditions of representability of new socio-sexual subjects in contemporary fiction and poetry, cultural theory, and the writing of history, the essays engage a multiplicity of discourses, positioning themselves both within and between them, and move across disciplinary fields and critical methodologies from performance, film, and feminist theory to psychoanalysis, history, sociology, and literature. Each in its own way, the essays recast the terms of the discourses they engage to expand or shift their semantic horizons and to rethink the sexual in new ways, elsewhere and other-wise. This elsewhere is not a utopia, an otherworldly or future place and time. It is already here, in the essays' work to deconstruct the silences of history and of our own discursive constructions, in the differently erotic mappings of the body, and in the imaging and enacting of new forms of community by the other-wise desiring subjects of this queer theory.

TERESA DE LAURETIS is professor of the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her most recent book in English is *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987). She is currently working on "The Practice of Love," a book on lesbian subjectivity, sexual structuring, and fantasy.

Notes

1 I wish to thank all the conference participants, as well as the authors of the essays included in this issue, for their presentations and contributions to the work of the conference. The participants were Francisco Alarcón, Tomás Almaguer, Lourdes Argüelles, Scott Bravmann, Sue-Ellen Case, Carolyn Clark, Michael Cowan, Julia Creet, Karen Davis, Samuel R. Delany, Julia Erhart, Elizabeth A. Grosz, Ramón García, Marjorie Garber, David Halperin, Donna Haraway, Sue Houchins, Earl Jackson, Jr., D. A. Miller, Madeline Moore, Ekua Omosupe, Vito Russo, Nancy Stoller Shaw, Jennifer Terry, David Thomas, Patricia White, and Carter Wilson. I also wish to acknowledge the generous support of many academic and administrative units on the UCSC campus, the Humanities Division, the Center for Cultural Studies, the Director of the Arts, the Boards of Studies in Literature and in History of Consciousness, and the Office of the President in Berkeley. Another grateful acknowledgment goes to the Conference Staff, Maggie Collins, Julia Creet, and Scott Bravmann, whose indefatigable attention greatly contributed to the success of the conference. And a final, special thank you to Julia Creet, who assisted me in the preliminary editing of the manuscript, and to Jenny Anger, Editorial Assistant for *differences*, who saw it through to the final edit and to publication.

2 The term "queer" was suggested to me by a conference in which I had participated and whose proceedings will be published in the forthcoming volume, ed. by Douglas Crimp and the Bad Object Choices, "How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video." My "queer," however, had no relation to the Queer Nation group, of whose existence I was ignorant at the time. As the essays will show, there is in fact very little in common between Queer Nation and this queer theory.

3 On the relation of lesbians to representations of gay male sex, see also Creet, "Lesbian Sex/Gay Sex."

4 Actually, at least one book of lesbian fiction had been published by 1977, Ann Allen Schockley's *Loving Her* (1974, reprinted by Naiad in 1987), and Smith does include it in a footnote, together with works by Lorde and Pat Parker (175), but without further mention. To all three these writers Smith refers as "a handful of Black women who have risked everything for truth. Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, and Ann Allen Schockley have at least broken ground in the vast wilderness of works that do not exist" (172).

5 This is by no means a complete list, but only an indication of the recent and growing number of published works by lesbian and gay writers of color. A much needed comprehensive survey would include authors of essays and short stories as well as poems and books of poetry, such as Francisco Alarcón, Cheryl Clark, Michelle Cliff, Jewelle Gomez, Janice Gould, and others too numerous to cite here.

Works Cited

Bearchell, Chris. "Why I am a gay liberationist: thoughts on sex, freedom, the family and the state." *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la Recherche Féministe [RFR/DRF]* 12.1 (1983): 57-60.

Case, Sue-Ellen. "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 11.1 (1988-89): 55-73.

Chung, C., A. Kim, and A. K. Lemeshewsky, eds. *Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians*. Santa Cruz, CA: Dancing Bird, 1987.

Clark, Wendy. "The Dyke, the Feminist and the Devil." *Sexuality: A Reader*. Ed. Feminist Review. London: Virago, 1987. 201-15.

Creet, Julia. "Lesbian Sex/Gay Sex: What's the Difference?" *Out/Look* 11 (1991): 29-34.

Crimp, Douglas, and the Bad Object Choices, eds. "How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video." Seattle: Bay, forthcoming.

Delany, Samuel R. *The Bridge of Lost Desire*. New York: Arbor House, 1987.

_____. *Flight from Nevèrÿon*. New York: Bantam, 1985.

_____. *Neveryóna, or the Tale of Signs and Cities*. New York: Bantam, 1983.

_____. *Tales of Nevèrÿon*. New York: Bantam, 1979.

Epstein, Steven. "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism." *Socialist Review* 17.3-4 (1987): 9-54.

Frye, Marilyn. "Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement: Another View of Male Supremacy, Another Separatism." *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1983. 128-50.

Garber, Eric, and Lyn Paleo. *Uranian Worlds: a reader's guide to alternative sexuality in science fiction and fantasy*. 2nd ed. Boston: Hall, 1990.

Gomez, Jewelle. *The Gilda Stories*. Ithaca: Firebrand, 1991.

Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1982.

Martin, Biddy, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It." *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986. 191-212.

McIntosh, Mary. "The Homosexual Role." *Social Problems* 17.2 (1986): 262-70.

Moraga, Cherríe. *Giving Up the Ghost: Teatro in Two Acts*. Los Angeles: West End, 1986.

Pérez, Emma. "Gulf Dreams." *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*. Ed. Carla Trujillo. Berkeley: Third Woman, 1991. 96-108.

Pratt, Minnie Bruce. "Identity: Skin Blood Heart." *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*. By Elly Bulkin, Pratt, and Barbara Smith. Brooklyn: Long Haul, 1984. 9-63.

Smith, Barbara. "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Smith. Old Westbury, NY: Feminist, 1982. 157-75.